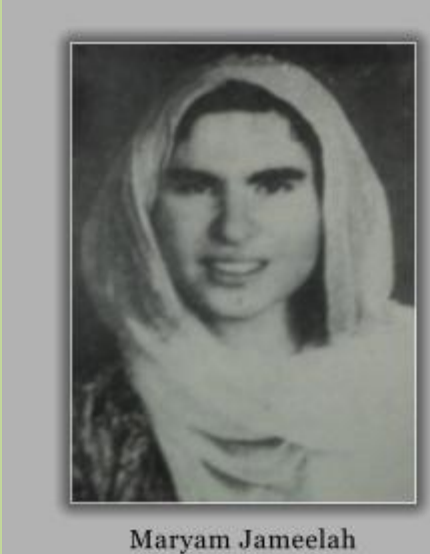
Maryam Jameelah

(Formerly, Margaret Marcus)

(born: May 23, 1934 – died: October 31, 2012, according to Wikipedia article)

Why I embraced Islam


Margaret and Betty



Maryam Jameelah
passport photo 1962

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بسم الله والحمد لله والصلوٰة والسلام عليٰ رسول الله

Bismillah Walhamdulillah Was Salaatu Was Salaam 'ala Rasulillah

Brothers and Sisters, Assalam o Alaikum:

Here I have narrated the reflections of one of the first American Jewish women to accept Islam. This narration below in her own words is not just a story, but the beginning of her literary mission to combat modernism inflicted on Islam by so called reformers.

Brothers and Sisters, we all have to be very careful to save us and other Muslims from this menace [of what they call ‘enlightened moderation’ or ‘modernism’]. Maryam Jameelah has written a great number of books to combat this, the list is at the end of this post.

The depth of the writer's faith is demonstrated by one of the significant events of her life that when she grew certain that her future as a Muslim was hopelessly bleak [in the USA], in 1961 [or 1962 to be precise] she migrated to Pakistan under the responsibility of Sayyid Maulana Maududi where

she has taken up permanent residence at the home of her husband's family in Lahore. [Muhammad Yusuf]

As she has quoted the Hadith on the very first page of her book "Islam and Orientalism"

" Ahwas bin Hakim reported from his father that a man asked the Messenger of Allah about evils. He replied: Don't ask me about evils but ask me regarding good (saying it thrice).

Then he said: "Beware ! Surely the worst of evils is the evil of the learned and surely the best of good is the good of the learned."

May Allah give me and everyone hidayah Ameen

Wassalam

Quoted from her book "Islam and Modernism"

Why I embraced Islam

MARYUM JAMEELAH

(formerly Margaret Marcus)

I trace the beginning of my interest in Islam when as a child of ten, while attending a reformed Jewish "Sunday School", I became fascinated with the historical relationship between the Jews and

the Arabs. From my Jewish textbooks, I learned that Abraham was the father of the Arabs as well as the Jews. I read how centuries later when in medieval Europe, Christian persecution made their lives intolerable, the Jews were welcomed in Muslim Spain and that it was the magnanimity if this same Arabic-Islamic civilization which stimulated Hebrew culture to reach its highest peak of achievement. Totally unaware of the true nature of Zionism, i naively thought that Jews were returning to Palestine to strengthen their close ties of kinship in religion and culture with their semitic cousins. Together i believed that the Jews and Arabs would cooperate to attain another Golden Age of culture in the Middle East.

Despite my fascination with the study of Jewish history, I was extremely unhappy at the "Sunday School". At this time i identified strongly with the Jewish people in Europe, then suffering a horrible fate under the Nazis and I was shocked that none of my class-fellows nor their parents took their religion seriously. During the services at the synagogue, the children used to read comic strips hidden in their prayer books and laugh to scorn at the rituals. The children were so noisy and disorderly that the teachers couldn't discipline them and found it very difficult to conduct the classes. At home the atmosphere for religious observance was scarcely more congenial. My elder sister detested the "Sunday School" so much that my mother literally had to drag her out of bed in the mornings and she never went without the struggle of tears and hot words. Finally my parents

were exhausted and let her quit. On the Jewish holy days instead of attending Synagogues and fasting on Yum Kipper, my sister and i were taken out of school to picnics and gay parties in fine restaurants. When my sister and i were convinced our parents how miserable we were both at the Sunday School they joined agnostic, humanist organization known as the ETHICAL CULTURE MOVEMENT.

The Ethical Culture Movement was founded late in the 19th century by Felix Adler. While studying for the rabbinate, Felix Adler grew convinced that devotion to ethical values as relative and man-made, regarding and supernaturalism or theology as irrelevant, constituted the only religion fit for the modern world. I attended the Ethical Culture "Sunday School" each week from the age of eleven until i graduated at fifteen. Here i grew into complete accord with the ideas of the movement ad regarded all traditional, organized religions with scorn.

Throughout my adolescence i remained under the influence of humanistic philosophy until, after i began to mature intellectually and atheism no longer satisfied me, I began a renewed search for my identity. For a time i joined a bahai group in New York called the "The caravan of East and West" under the leadership of a persian by the name of Mirza Ahmed Sohrab (D.1958) who told me that he had been the secretary of Abdul Baha, one of the founders of the Bahai. Initially i was attracted to the Bahai because of its Islamic origin

and its preaching about the oneness of the mankind, but when I discovered how miserably they had failed to implement this ideal, I left them a year later bitterly disillusioned. When i was eighteen years old, I became a member of the local branch of the religious Zionist youth movement known as the Mizrachi Hatzair, but when i found out what the real nature of Zionism was, which made hostility between Jews and Arabs irreconcilable, I left several months later in disgust. When I was twenty and a student in New York University , one of my elective courses was "Judaism in Islam". My professor, Rabbi Abraham Issac Katsh, the head of the Department of Hebrew Studies there, he spared no efforts to convince his students -- all Jews many of whom aspired to become Rabbis-- that Islam was derived from Judaism. Our textbook, written by him * took each verse from the Quran , painstakingly tracing it to its alleged Jewish source. Although his real aim was to prove to his students the superiority of Judaism over Islam, he convinced me diametrically the opposite. I was repelled by the sub-ordination of the Hereafter, so vividly ported in the Holy Quran, to the alleged divine right of the Jews to Palestine. The Jewish God in the Old Testament and in the Jewish prayer book appeared to me distorted and degraded into some kind of real estate agent ! The fusion of Parochial nationalism with religion, I thought had spiritually impoverished Judaism beyond redemption. The rigid exclusiveness of Judaism I felt had a great deal of connection with the persecutions the Jews have suffered throughout their history. I reflected

that perhaps these tragedies wouldn't have happened if the jews had competed vigorously with other faiths for converts. I soon discovered that Zionism was merely a combination of the racist, tribalistic Judaism with modern secular nationalism. Zionism was further discredited in my eyes when i learnt that few if any of the leaders of the Zionism were observant Jews and that perhaps nowhere is orthodox, traditional Judaism regarded with such intense contempt as in Israel. When i found nearly all important Jewish leaders in America uncritical supporters of Zionism who felt not the slightest twinge of conscience because of the terrible injustice inflicted on the Palestinian Arabs, i could no longer consider myself a Jew at heart.

One morning in November 1954, Professor Katsh during his lecture, argued with irrefutable logic that the monotheism taught my Moses (PBUH) and the Divine laws related to him at Sinai were indispensable as the basis for all higher ethical values.If morals were purely man-made as the Ethical Culture and other agnostic and atheistic philosophies taught then they could be changed at will according to mere whim, convenience or circumstance. The result would be utter chaos leading to individual and collective ruin. Belief in the Hereafter as the Rabbis in the Talmud taught, argued Prof. Katsh. was not mere wishful thinking but a moral necessity. Only those he said who firmly believed that each of us will be summoned by God on judgment Day to render a complete account of our life and rewarded or punished

accordingly, will possess the self-discipline to sacrifice transitory pleasures and endure hardships and sacrifice to attain lasting good. While Prof. Katsh was lecturing thus, i was comparing in my mind what i had read in the Old Testament and the Talmud with what was taught in the Quran and Hadith and finding Judaism so defective , I was converted to Islam.

Although i wanted to become a Muslim as far back as in 1954, my family managed to argue me out of it. I was warned that Islam would complicate my life because it is not like Judaism and Christianity, part of the American scene. I was told that Islam would alienate me from my family and isolate me from the community. At that time my faith wasn't sufficiently strong to withstand these pressures. Partly as the result of my inner turmoil, I became so ill that i had to discontinue college long before it was any time for me to graduate so that i never earned any diploma. For the next two years i remained at home under private medical care, steadily growing worse. in desperation from 1957-1959, my parents confined me both to private and public hospitals where i vowed that if i ever recovered sufficiently to be discharged i would embrace Islam.

After i was allowed to return home, I investigated all the opportunities to meet Muslims in New York City and it was my good fortune to make the acquaintance of some of the finest men and women anyone could ever hope to meet. I also began to write articles for Muslim magazines and carry on

an extensive correspondence with Muslim leaders all over the world. I corresponded with the late Sheikh Abrahimi, the leader of the ulema in Algeria, Dr, Muhammad El-Bahay of Al-Azhar, Dr. Mahmud F Hoballah, then the director of the Islamic center in Washington D.C., Dr. Hameedullah of Paris, Dr. Said Ramadan, the director of the islamic center of Geneva, and Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maudoodi.

Even before I formally embraced Islam, I found the integrity of the faith in the contemporary world greatly threatened by the so-called modernist movement which aimed at adulterating its teachings with man-made philosophies and reforms. I was convinced that had these modernizes had their way , nothing of the original would be left ! As a child I had witnessed with my own eyes in my own family how the liberals had mutilated what had once been a Divinely revealed faith. Having been born a Jew and reared in a Jewish family ,i had seen how futile was the attempt to reconcile religion with atheistic environment. "Reformed Judaism" not only failed to check the cultural assimilation of the Jews i knew but actively encouraged the process. As a result they had become Jews by label only. None had any religion worthy of the name. Throughout my childhood, the intellectual dishonesty, hypocrisy and superficiality of "reformed" Judaism was a vivid experience. Even at that early age i knew that such a watered down, half-hearted compromise could never hope to retain the loyalty of its members, much less their children. How

dismayed I was when I found among the muslims, the same threat! How shocked I was when I found certain scholars and some political leaders within the Muslim community guilty of the identical sins for which the God in our Holy Quran has vehemently denounced the Jews! Convinced that God wouldn't spare us from calamity and doom us to the same fate the Jews have suffered unless we sincerely repented and changed our ways, I vowed that I would devote all my literary struggle to combating this menace from within before it was too late.

Thus in his first letter to me of January 1961, Maulana Maudoodi wrote:

"While I was scanning your essays, I felt as if I were reading my very own ideas. I hope your feeling will be the same when you have the opportunity to learn Urdu and study my books. And that despite the fact that there has been no previous acquaintance between you and me, this mutual sympathy and unanimity in thought has resulted directly from the fact that both of us have derived our inspiration from one and the same source--Islam"

-MARYUM JAMEELAH's BOOKS-

1. ISLAM VERSUS THE WEST

2. ISLAM AND MODERNISM

3. ISLAM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

4. ISLAM VERSUS AHL AL KITAB PAST AND PRESENT

5. AHMAD KHALIL

6. ISLAM AND ORIENTALISM

7. WESTERN CIVILIZATION CONDEMNED BY ITSELF

8. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MAULANA MAUDOODI AND MARYUM JAMEELAH

9. ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY

10. A MANIFESTO OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

11. IS WESTERN CIVILIZATION UNIVERSAL

12 WHO IS MAUDOODI?

13 WHY I EMBRACED ISLAM

14 ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM WOMAN TODAY

15 ISLAM AND SOCIAL HABITS
16 ISLAMIC CULTURE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE